

New Ways To Make Money On The Farm

Goat Lady Perfects "Multi-Level Marketing"

When the mohair market crashed in the early 1990's, Ada Austin didn't know where to turn. Her 200 angora goats had almost no value for either hair or meat. Desperation forced inspiration, and soon she was direct-marketing all kinds of mohair products herself: raw, washed or spun hair; woven sweaters, socks and mittens; and various decorations, ornaments and pelts she worked from a room on the side of her farmhouse. The store has since expanded twice but best of all, she has created a multi-level marketing program for 15 stay-at-home moms who create the crafts she sells.

"It's called 'woman with back to wall,'" explains the self-proclaimed Goat Lady of Harmony, Minnesota. "Every one of us has had her back to the wall and had to be creative to make money. This is what we've done."

Austin and her stay-at-home mothers buy and sell from each other; there are no other employees.

Here's how it works: Austin sells hair to a woman who dyes it and then sells it back to her. Some of the dyed hair is marketed in Austin's on-farm store, while the rest is sold to women who make crafts from it or spin it. In most cases, it is again sold back to Austin unless the crafters find another market for it.

Some items sell faster than others, like

the mohair socks that have become Austin's bread and butter. All you have to do is try on a pair to see why many people won't wear anything else, even at \$22 a pair. Machine washable, they stay warm, yet feet don't sweat.

"They saved my marriage," jokes Austin. "My husband works outside in heavy boots all day. His feet used to smell terribly every night when he took off those boots. With these socks, they don't sweat or smell, and a pair of socks washed every night, lasts all winter."

Eventually, everything sells, says Austin, but in the meantime everyone has made money on her efforts. No one, including her, has money tied up in production for long.

"What's really good for the moms is that they get the money as fast as they finish their work," says Austin. "If they were consigning, it might sit on the shelf for weeks or months before they would get paid."

The goat lady hasn't stopped innovating. Because quality mohair can only be harvested from young goats, Austin has had to find markets for mature goats. When her husband suggested butchering a load of goats and selling the meat, she couldn't believe there would be a market. But the first year she sold 90 head for meat. The next year she sold 140 and in 2003 even more. She has yet to advertise the low cholesterol meat cuts and low



Dyed hair is sold in Austin's on-farm store, while leftovers are sold to women who make crafts or spin it into yarn. Virtually every part of the animal sells.

sodium sausage. All sales are word of mouth and the result of samples offered in the store.

As if meat and hair wasn't enough, she even sells the hoof tip trimmings for dog treats. Skulls with horns can bring from \$35 to \$100 each. Old goat hair is woven into rugs, and hides are fleshed out and shipped to Pennsylvania to be cured and sold for several hundred dollars each, depending on size and quality.

"We are wasting nothing from the tip of the horn to the tip of the hoof," says Austin. "But if anyone has any ideas for more uses, we would be happy to hear them."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Austin's Angora Goats and Mohair Gift Shop, RR2, Box 41B, Harmony, Minn. 55939 (ph 507 886-6731; email: mohair@means.net; website: www.austinsmohair.web.com).

Breeding Bigger Sunflower Seeds

If you like to eat sunflower seeds, you've got a real friend in Ray Meuchel. For the past 30 years, the Salem, Ore. man has been trying to breed a bigger confectionery seed.

"I grew up eating them in North Dakota, but when I moved to Oregon, there just weren't any," explains Meuchel. "I started growing them to eat and began breeding them as a hobby. They kept getting bigger, but so did the problems with them."

Now retired from a career as a UPS driver, Meuchel is breeding sunflowers full time and getting closer to what he says is the perfect seed.

In 1991 he got his first seed over an inch long, nearly twice the length of commer-

cial seeds. In 1997 he got his first kernels over an inch long. The problem since then has been to make sure the kernels inside the large shells are always large. His goal is a 1 1/2-in. seed with a 1-in. kernel.

"It's been my feeling from the start that you can only fool the customer so many times before he wises up," he says, about large shells that sometimes have small seeds inside.

He notes that confectionery sunflowers are not a big market in this country. However, in Spain, Turkey and China, the consumers will come running for a larger seed, he adds.

Meuchel has come a long way from backyard breeding. Today he is working with



Ray Meuchel is getting closer to perfecting edible seeds that are five times bigger than normal.

University researchers from Oregon and North Dakota and a major seed company. They are searching for chromosome markers for the large kernel/large seed.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Ray Meuchel, 1135 Clearlake Rd. NE, Salem, Ore. 97303 (ph 503 390-1371; email: karaym@juno.com).

Where To Buy Bags, Signs And More

Are you looking for bags, banners and placards for a farm produce stand? Are you stocked up on nursery supplies like burlap squares and twine? Do you have all the bags and boxes you need for packaging fish from the bass pond? For the past 80 years, farmers have been turning to Wasserman Bag Co. for packaging needs from containers to packing equipment, sales and repair.

"My father says it's the first 100 years that are the toughest," says Karen Wasserman, the founder's granddaughter. "As we've expanded over the years, we've become a one stop shop. People used to come to us for potato bags. Now they come for poly bags, wire closers and weighing equipment and so on."

Wasserman Bag started out serving growers predominantly on Long Island, New York. Nowadays they ship nationally and have a Midwest office in Indiana.

The business is constantly changing to reflect changes in farm marketing, says Wasserman. The firm sells generic packaging materials of all sorts and sizes, as well as custom-designed and printed products. A short list of products includes plastic

clamshells, vegetable boxes, corn bags, potato and onion bags, as well as squash and pumpkin bags. They also sell all types of strawberry and farmstand supplies as well as aquaculture and seafood bags.

"A large portion of our business is specialty bags, such as small mesh bags for gourmet potatoes or pearl onions," she says. "People are packing in smaller sacks, and everyone is looking for a marketing edge, so print quality, color and design have all changed. After all, many times it is the package that sells the product."

The company also sells and services closing, weighing and grading equipment. Wasserman notes that there is a lot of old equipment around that can be repaired.

"We've seen machines so old that even we don't know what they are supposed to do," she says. "In one case, we called the owner and asked what it was. He said he didn't know and told us to keep it."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Karen Wasserman, Wasserman Bag Co., 70 Commerce Pl., Hicksville, N.Y. 11801 (ph 516 681-5900; email: wassermanbag@aol.com).



A large portion of Wasserman's business is for specialty bags, boxes and other kinds of packaging for farm-based businesses.

How To Reach Us

To submit a "Made It Myself" Story Idea, New Product, Shop Tip, "Best or Worst Buy", or other information, send a note along with photos, drawings and literature, if available. We'll get back to you later if we need more details. Send to: Editor, FARM SHOW, P.O. Box 1029, Lakeville, Minn. 55044 (ph 1-800-834-9665; fax 952 469-5575). E-Mail: Editor@farmshow.com. You can also submit information at our

Website: [Http://www.farmshow.com](http://www.farmshow.com).

To change your address, renew your subscription, take out a new subscription, order videos or books, or for other information regarding your subscription, contact: Circulation Department, FARM SHOW, P.O. Box 1029, Lakeville, Minn. 55044 (ph 1-800-834-9665; fax 952 469-5575) E-Mail: Circulation@farmshow.com.